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ABSTRACT

Current issues and trends in kindergarten, as evidenced by research, are described. Topics include shifts in kindergarten curriculum, demographic shifts, and trends for the 1990s. Also discussed are possible strategies for change in kindergarten. Concluding remarks focus on the instructional leader's role in the future of kindergarten. Administrators are encouraged to examine budget expenditures for long-range benefits gleaned from monies spent providing the successful foundation in kindergarten upon which further school learning is based. (RH)

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Early Childhood Supervision: Issues and Implications

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Early Childhood Supervision: Issues and Implications

This paper describes the current issues and trends in kindergarten as evidenced by research. Shifts in kindergarten curriculum, demographic shifts, and trends for the 90s are addressed. A discussion of possible strategies for change in kindergarten are also presented. The instructional leader's role in the future of kindergarten concludes the paper. Administrators are encouraged to examine budget expenditures for long-range benefits gleaned from monies spent providing that successful foundation for further school learning.

Early Childhood Supervision: Issues and Implications

In order to address the specific objectives of this paper (supervision in kindergarten), a brief review of literature will be provided regarding the following topics: a) kindergarten curricula; b) current issues and trends in kindergarten; and c) methods of observation in kindergarten classrooms. Additional information will be provided to assist in recognizing "developmentally appropriate" practice in kindergarten.

Kindergarten Past and Future

Kindergarten was introduced in 1855-56 in the United States. Kindergartens began as child-centered programs which emphasized learning-by-doing, natural experience, and development of the whole child through free play (Bartolini & Wasem, 1985).

There is consensus in early childhood education that a major shift in the kindergarten curriculum has evolved during the past 15 to 20 years. This shift was described by Spodek (1981, p.27), "The concern for development in young children and for the creation of programs reflecting their needs and interests seems to be lessening." Kindergarten appears to be reconstituted, it is essentially a downward extension of primary education. This change emphasizes the

concern for continuity of achievement rather than continuity of development. In its place can be found a concern for the achievement of specific learning goals.

Demographic Influences

Valora Washington (1988a) describes five demographic trends which can be expected in the 1990's in early childhood:

1. Demographic shifts in population due to increases in the number of children, a large percentage of whom will be Black or Hispanic;
2. Changes in the ecological context of childhood, suggesting the need to prepare children to adapt to future complexities and uncertainties;
3. Increased potential for polarization and conflict between age or ethnic groups as the proportion of the young grows relative to the elderly, and the proportion of chidren of color rises;
4. Increased tension related to instructional issues, such as the appropriate school age, length of school day, curriculum content and computer use; and
5. Increased concern about the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of educational programs. (p. 4)

Morrison (1984) reported that child abuse, stress, the importance of parenting skills, and mainstreaming are also areas of change in early childhood education. Early

Childhood Education is highlighted in the media and becoming a topic of discussion on major talk shows. Kindergarten education has become the norm rather than a choice for the social development of young children. The implementation of public school programs for 4-year-olds has also influenced the curriculum of kindergartens across the United States. Although 5-year-old posses greater sophistication in "going-to-school-skills" than in years past, this sophistication is often misinterpreted for acceleration in learning academic content (Evertson, Emmer, Clements, Sanford, & Worsham, 1984). Five-year-olds are experiencing stress, frustration, and failure due to unrealistic expectations for academic performance in the school setting.

In 1986, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published a manual entitled Developmentally Appropriate Practice. This manual presents the NAEYC Position Statement on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. This manual has been highlighted in the early childhood literature since publication and its impact is being experienced across the United States.

Peck, McCaig, and Sapp (1988) have published one of the most current and informative pieces of literature concerning early childhood, Kindergarten Policies: What is Best for Children?. They discuss the issues of kindergarten entrance age, appropriate tests to measure kindergarten children's entry-level skills, and appropriate kindergarten curriculum.

Additional issues in early childhood education include: lack of parent involvement; appropriate public school programs for 4-year-olds; the integration of "models" and "curriculum kits" which do not complement one another; and using classroom time effectively (classroom management).

Some current trends in early childhood are: re-emphasizing the development of the "whole child"; encouraging writing- the use of journals in the teaching letter/sound recognition, invented spelling; technology in the classsroom- such as computer use, television, etc.; and public attention focussed upon appropriateness of education for young children.

Some trends in education for the 90's appear to be: the "holistic" approach in language and thinking (Goodman, 1987); teaching metacognitive strategies (Costa, 1985); and increases in classroom time spent interacting with students (Stallings, 1984).

The past function of kindergarten was to provide children with their first school experience. Today, kindergartens must account for the diverse abilities of 5-year-olds. Naron (1981) concluded that "the new function of kindergarten requires more instructional time and better instructional tools than existed in traditional half-day kindergarten settings" (p. 307).

Facing the Issues and the Future

The pendulum appears to be swinging in terms of educating 5-year-olds. The search for strategies to improve the quality of teaching is an endeavor in which researchers have been engaged for decades (Evertson & Smylie, 1986). These issues were addressed, however; by various historical figures in early childhood- Froebel, Piaget, G. Stanley Hall, Benjamin Bloom, and many others. Classroom teachers must reach back into developmental theories and previously popular models, and integrate them into their teaching repertoire.

Morrison (1984) recommended that the qualities of teachers be re-emphasized in teacher education as well as in teacher selection. The prescribed qualities for early childhood teachers are: caring, compassion, courtesy, empathy, enthusiasm, helpfulness, honesty, intelligence, kindness, loving, motivation, patience, sensitivity, understanding, and warmth. Additional characteristics include: the abilitiy to communicate effectively with teachers, parents, and children, the ability to select appropriate methods and materials for utilization with young children, and the ability to enhance creativity.

Early childhood teachers have the challenge of preparing today's children for tomorrow's world (Washington, 1988b). She questioned, "What kind of people do we want in the 21st century?" (p. 6). With this in mind, one must consider that children develop in a changing

society and they themselves later become active contributors. Hartman (1977) used the following approaches to prepare her preschool children for increased societal complexities and future uncertainties:

1. Helping children develop focussing skills necessary to deal with a higly stimulating world. Children were taught to focus upon a task with few materials at a time.
2. Decision-making skills were enhanced through offering children a carefully selected limited supply of materials from which to choose.
3. Children were taught "coping" skills in order to foster independence.
4. Children were offered first-hand, rather than vicarious, experiences in order to keep curiosity and inner resources alive.

NAEYC also recognized the integrated components of appropriate and inappropriate practice in early childhood education (Bredekamp, 1986). Socioemotional development is presently overlooked, particularly in public school settings. With the aforementioned demographic shifts in American society, and therefore, in the issues related to schooling, educational leaders must play an even more important role than ever before. Educational leaders must begin to focus on these changes, address the upcoming issues, and assist teachers in effectively meeting the needs of very diverse 5-year-olds.

Implications for Instructional Leaders

The influence of the demographic changes in society will have serious impact upon school programs. As previously mentioned, one area of schooling most greatly influenced will be the early childhood years. Instructional leaders must be knowledgeable, provide support, and assist in the evolving changes which are likely to occur in schools within the next several years.

The following list of implications were deducted from research readings, previous experiences, and interviews with elementary principals and supervisors. This list includes various roles and responsibilites necessary for instructional leaders to serve teachers, parents, and children effectively in quality early childhood programs:

1. Become aware of current and forthcoming issues and trends in early childhood.
2. Select teachers with specialized training in the area of Early Childhood Education to work with young children.
3. In carefully selecting these important teachers, pay close attention to those qualities deemed as important for the special task of working with the very young (Morrison, 1984).
4. Recognize and encourage those special qualities in current faculty members in order to help foster their worth and value in the teaching profession.

5. Support teachers, parents, and children through persistence in organizing, implementing, and evaluating developmentally appropriate curricula for children.
6. Observe teachers frequently and with a focus upon a single classroom variable (i.e., classroom time usage, time on-task, frequency and quality of interactions between teachers and students).
7. Conference with teachers following observations concerning their continuous development as effective teachers.
8. Allow early childhood teachers to have input regarding the selection of staff development topics, services, and focus. Teachers who feel ownership in staff development are more attentive, more eager to implement ideas and strategies, and as a result, become more effective teachers.
9. Provide staff development specifically designed for early childhood so that research and strategies which are inappropriate for young children are neither watered down nor implemented ineffectively in classrooms.
10. Maintain a strong relationship with teacher education departments in order to work together toward providing young children with teachers who are specifically trained to meet their needs.

Conclusions

There is general agreement among current scholars in early childhood education that the pressures of the academically oriented curriculum are a major contributor to failure and frustration among kindergarten children (Bartolini & Wasem, 1985; Peck, McCaig, & Sapp, 1988; Seefeldt, 1985; and Spodek, 1981). In addition, the demographic changes in society will greatly influence school programs in the future. The implications are that the preschool experience is where the intervention process must occur. The early years provide the successful foundation for further school learning.

Etheridge (1986) maintained that young children are in the process of building intellectual skills, social awareness, and views of who they are. They are quantitatively and qualitatively different from adults. Etheridge (1986) further stated:

> When considering 'what is absolutely necessary for young children to learn?' we do not conclude that any fact, skill, or set of academic content is crucial. Rather, we conclude that facts, skills, and academic content are tools the teacher can utilize to actively engage the development of the whole child (p. 25).

Seefeldt (1985) advocated that "administrators have the knowledge and intelligence - as well as the right and responsibility - to preserve the kindergarten as 'a garden of growth' for 5-year-olds" (p. 15).

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